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SUBJECT: St. Vincent Eager to Cooperate on Anti-TIP Measures

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Summary  
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¶1. The Office to Counter Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP) consultant's August 24-27 meetings with Vincentian government (GOSVG) and NGO representatives revealed receptiveness to further anti-TIP cooperation, from expanded legislation beyond the Organization for Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) model currently under review, to police training and public awareness campaigns. Despite the GOSVG's negative reaction to G/TIP's watch-list ranking, government interlocutors, including Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, vowed to cooperate with the USG in an effort to take a proactive approach to tackling TIP, to include developing measures to ensure that proper mechanisms are in place to respond to reports of trafficking. End Summary.

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Moving Forward, Quickly  
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¶2. G/TIP consultant and PolOff's three-hour meeting with PM Ralph Gonsalves resulted in a positive affirmation that, while the GOSVG was taken aback by the Tier 2 Watchlist ranking in the 2008 TIP Report, the government is willing to cooperate fully on any anti-TIP activities deemed productive by the USG. Gonsalves did not hide his frustration regarding the Report's ranking, questioning the Department's investigation techniques and bashing the USG for publicizing its findings without prior consultation with the GOSVG. He further recounted repeatedly his discussions, following the Report's release, with the Charge d'Affaires and A/S Shannon, referring also to his letter to the Secretary which he circulated throughout the UN General Assembly. Beyond his apparent angst, however, the PM, who was accompanied by his National Security Advisor and former party leader, Sir Vincent Beache, said the GOSVG was ready to move forward with any technical and other assistance that could be provided. The PM was especially open to the idea of tailoring and expanding current laws to deal with TIP, to ensure proper mechanisms would be in place should any cases of TIP arise.

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No Reports, but Possibilities  
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¶3. All other government interlocutors, including the Police Commissioner's office, Public Prosecutor, Immigration department, and most NGOs, claimed that no evidence of TIP had ever formally surfaced in St. Vincent, nor had any cases been brought to the attention of the GOSVG. Despite the absence of TIP cases, all agreed that a better understanding of the definition of trafficking is needed, and that future public discussions could benefit that understanding -- in fact, most of the contacts we met with were unaware of definitions of TIP beyond transnational prostitution. NGO and GOSVG representatives alike also believed that preventative measures should be put in place to thwart potential future TIP activities. The Ministry of National Mobilization went so far as to read aloud its official four-point position, reiterating its willingness to take a proactive approach and cooperate with other

countries to fight TIP effectively.

¶4. As G/TIP consultant and PolOff clarified the broader definition of TIP to include domestic charges, and the potentiality of cases due to the lack of proper legislation and awareness, police and intelligence officials began to identify possible cases. In particular, one officer noted, a recent drug raid revealed that minors may have been forced into the production of cannabis, using impoverished teenagers to cart electric generators and fuel to production sites in the island's mountainous interior. The Police Commissioner was quick to point out, however, that such claims could have been made by defendants hoping to avoid prosecution by claiming they had been trafficked. According to the Police Commissioner's office, no further investigations or interviews were conducted in that case to ascertain whether the minors were actually victims of TIP -- and no prosecutions were undertaken.

¶5. Separately, the Human Rights Association (HRA) NGO claimed that women from other countries (most notably Costa Rica) had been brought into St. Vincent under false pretences to work in the sex industry there. The NGO also alleged that the women had their passports seized. Additionally, HRA maintained that cases of parents exploiting their own children for sex as a means of income had been seen in the courts, but were brought to court as rape charges vice trafficking cases. Although these allegations were not corroborated by the Attorney General's Chambers, police, or Immigration, HRA did vow to tabulate cases brought to court for USG review. Given such supposed occurrences, HRA agreed that more TIP awareness was needed and advised that, should training occur, the OECS Secretariat and Judicial Education Institute -- both located in nearby St. Lucia -- should be included. In-country seminars, held as town halls and on the radio, and police training were other possible areas highlighted by the NGO.

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Reviewing Legislation  
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¶6. Legislative Consultant to the Attorney General Peter Purseglove (a UK national who works under contract for the GOSVG) said that the Attorney General's Chambers is currently reviewing the OECS model legislation on Human Trafficking, in addition to the UN's Transnational Crime Convention (aka Palermo Protocol). He seemed confident that the Palermo Protocol would be ratified by the end of ¶2009. Purseglove believed that further tailoring of the OECS model to St. Vincent's situation would be required, and appeared amenable to future cooperation with the USG on the drafting of TIP-specific legislation. Public Prosecutions Director R. Colin Williams agreed separately that legislation has to be dynamic, and was certain that the GOSVG as a whole would concur. In an earlier meeting, Acting Chief Immigration Officer Beverly Walker alluded to the importance of having anti-TIP legislation harmonized throughout the region, to ensure that those deported by St. Vincent would not be able to evade prosecution elsewhere.

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Comment: Receptivity Abounds  
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¶7. Each meeting confirmed that anti-TIP cooperation would be welcomed by the GOSVG and NGOs alike. All hoped that such cooperation could be quickly forthcoming, and that the USG would do more to help guide its anti-TIP-related contacts on what actions should be taken should cases emerge. On the basis of these discussions, there are a number of areas for cooperation that appear ripe for exploration, from police training and legislation drafting, to education and public awareness. Post will follow up on the claims made by the Human Rights Association and include, as appropriate, its findings within the 2009 Report. End Comment.